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FOR INFORMATION

COUNTRY NOTE**

India

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country note for India for a programme of cooperation for the period 1998 to 2002.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Three major developments of the last few years continue to influence the situation of children. Firstly, economic reforms introduced in 1991 have boosted economic growth. Secondly, recent constitutional changes mandate a devolution of power to local bodies (panchayati raj in rural areas and nagar-palika in urban) and reservation of one third of elected seats for women. Thirdly, the emergence of a large number of active women's groups has helped to shape local governance and advance the agenda of children. A more recent development has been the announcement of the Common Minimum Programme by the Government which focuses on ensuring basic entitlements for the poor and greater decentralization to states. The IX National Five-Year Plan is expected to fully endorse commitments to all of the World Summit for Children goals.

2. The situation of India's children is marked by diversity, persistent disparities and the challenge of enormous numbers - nearly 370 million children in 1995. Progress is visible in almost all development sectors, yet disparities are striking, with low status of women and gender inequality as major barriers. Gender disadvantages are compounded by considerations of caste and class. In 1991, 61 per cent of India's women could not read or write, with a female

* E/ICEF/1997/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its third regular session of 1997.

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literacy rate of less than 10 per cent in many districts. The infant mortality rate has been halved from 140 per 1,000 live births in 1971 to 73 in 1994, yet almost 3 million children under five years old still die each year. Malnutrition and disease act synergistically, with acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea the leading causes of young child deaths. More than one third of babies are born with low birth weight, caused primarily by poor maternal and adolescent nutrition, and some 53 per cent of children under four years old are malnourished. There has been a sharp decline in the incidence of immunizable diseases, although significant gaps in immunization coverage remain. Maternal mortality claims over 100,000 women each year, reflecting unsafe abortions and limited access to emergency obstetric care. High levels of anaemia among both women and adolescent girls (over 80 per cent) contribute to these deaths. An estimated 2 million or more people are infected with HIV, yet awareness of HIV among the public, and particularly women, is very low.

3. The National and State Plans of Action for Children have helped to focus the World Summit goals, many of which are close to being achieved, such as guinea worm eradication and a 50 per cent reduction in diarrhoeal deaths from mid-1980 levels. Ninety per cent of India's villages have access to safe drinking water, but problems of declining water-tables, adequacy and quality of water remain. Some 20 per cent of rural households have access to sanitary latrines, up from 3 per cent 10 years ago. The education gap between boys and girls is narrowing, but drop-out rates continue to be high, especially among girls, with fewer than 50 per cent completing Grade V. Substantial investments are changing this picture, as demand rises for education and universal primary education as a constitutional right. The Government is committed to eliminating hazardous and bonded child labour - which affects some 2.5 million children - before the year 2000, but millions of children will still be engaged in other forms of full-time work. The issue of child prostitution has only recently been added to the public agenda. India's report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child is likely to be presented shortly.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

4. The mid-term review in 1993 pointed to the need for greater convergence of programmes, emphasized the role of women's groups and urged the phasing out from programmes where national capabilities were now in place. UNICEF has since withdrawn direct support to a number of programmes and has critically reviewed support to all sectors. The two-year (1996-1997) bridging programme has provided an opportunity to refine strategies and explore shifts in major programme areas. An evaluation of the Bihar Education Project called for a further shift of UNICEF support away from facilities and supplies towards training and community mobilization.

5. In all sectors, effectiveness has been based on an increasing focus on prevention. In spite of years of attention and substantial resources directed to tackle malnutrition, results have been far less than expected, largely because the needs of the young child were not addressed. The emergence of thousands of women's groups, often a by-product of literacy campaigns, successful women's projects or collective savings programmes, has demonstrated the solidarity and activism that women can bring to the development process. Women's groups have often moved to take up broader social issues, such as the misuse of alcohol and violence against women. To ensure the sustainability of programmes and to respond to India's diversity, decentralization in national programmes, as well as in UNICEF operations, has been critical.

PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

6. The overall objectives of the Government of India-UNICEF programme of cooperation are to assist the Government to (a) realize universal child rights by assuring that society will respect, protect and find ways to fulfil obligations to children, including the achievement of the World Summit goals; (b) ensure that the rights of women are met progressively through improving the position of girls and women in society; and (c) strengthen the capacities of communities to analyse their own situation, set priorities and monitor activities in each sector. Following extensive consultation with counterpart government ministries, the Planning Commission, United Nations agencies, bilateral donors, representatives of Executive Board member countries, NGO partners and important social institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission and the National Commission on Women, four strategies, which are woven through all the programmes, have been selected to meet those objectives.

7. A strategic focus on convergent community action emphasizes support for capacity-building to bring government service providers into a closer and more responsive working relationship with an informed and actively participating community. A team approach will be fostered between community and front-line workers serving as facilitators, with strategic allies both outside as well as inside the community. A wide range of government services, reaching every community, is now in place. Contrasted settings and the different pace of devolution across the country call for location-specific and flexible approaches.

8. Ensuring the centrality of women is also a capacity-building approach that seeks to reduce gender inequalities in all areas of activity. Women's participation must entail genuine control of resources and decision-making. Every programme will involve women in planning and implementation, remove traditional stereotypes of girls and women, build self-esteem and monitor progress against gender-related indicators. This will be supported by selective support to local women's movements, orientation and support for leadership to newly elected members of panchayats (local bodies), the disaggregation and use of gender-specific data, and ensuring that men support these efforts.

9. Within policies laid out at the national level, the strategic approach to capacity-building for decentralization will encourage each programme to adopt decentralized and participatory planning mechanisms, linking up with panchayati raj and nagar-palika institutions and other community organizations at local levels. Urban areas will be mobilized in new approaches to planning and implementation of social sector activities in slums. The 10 state offices of UNICEF have the potential to facilitate this process.

10. Forging new partnerships is a strategy that aims to involve key partners and use UNICEF resources for leverage. UNICEF acts as a catalyst, contributing new ideas and testing new approaches. Support will focus on human resource development, the identification of cost-effective ways of reaching the unreached and advocacy for child rights. UNICEF works closely with the World Bank, the United Nations, other multilateral agencies and donors. The rights perspective brings new partnerships into focus with the media, political organizations, youth, representatives of civil society and the private sector.

11. Individual programme objectives developed in this strategic frame will be supported by advocacy towards the realization of child rights in each sector. In health, renewed attention will be given to the reduction of maternal and perinatal mortality/newborn care in a framework of reproductive and child health, and strengthening service delivery through decentralized planning and operational research. Nutrition will be improved through the Integrated Child

Development Services' network of anganwadis (child care centres), with a focus on improving caring practices as well as giving special attention to children in the first year of life, adolescent girls and pregnant women. The programme aims at achieving universal salt iodization by the year 2000 and will combat nutritional anaemia and vitamin A deficiencies through supplementation, new initiatives in fortification and dietary change. In child development, there will be more attention to early childhood stimulation, making the anganwadi an attractive and "joyful" (making learning fun) centre, and improving the skills of the anganwadi worker.

12. The effort to universalize primary education will focus on the incremental approach to enrolment and retention, starting with six-year-old children in Class I until the entire cohort completes five years of schooling. It will emphasize improvements in the quality of education through the teacher empowerment approach, child-centred teaching, child-to-child activities and the active participation of parents and the community. In close collaboration with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, the prevention of HIV/AIDS will focus on introducing life skills in schools and the provision of relevant information through women's and youth groups. In the area of child's environment, emphasis will be on the quality and sustainability of safe drinking water sources, including community-based watershed management. Individual responsibility for sanitation and community hygiene will be promoted through appropriate latrine technologies and education. Efforts for children in need of special protection will aim to mobilize civil society to take action against violations of child rights, notably child labour and child prostitution. This will include data collection and analysis for social and policy change, and intensifying communication efforts to change societal attitudes.

13. The strategy for convergent community action aims to bring together all programme areas and will be supported in selected districts, applying lessons learned to establish an intersectoral approach for the overall country programme. It will require specific budgetary allocations in addition to resources available under sectoral programmes.

14. The above strategies and programme objectives will guide the allocation of UNICEF resources. The activities supported within each programme will represent an appropriate mix among service delivery, capacity-building and advocacy; the balance will be determined in light of population needs, national policies and existing and planned programme activities of the Government, communities, donors and other partners. Supplementary funding will be sought to extend the coverage of programme and undertake new initiatives.

15. Success of the overall programme will rely upon effective decentralization and good management capacity. Monitoring of both outcomes and processes at all levels will be encouraged to ensure relevance and intersectoral action, using data generated by multi-indicator cluster surveys. Selected programme areas will be evaluated each year, with the results used to assess performance and derive lessons for current and future programmes. The effectiveness of the use of human, organizational and financial resources will be an important measure of sustainability.

ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

16. The estimated budget for general resources of $174,325,000 will be allocated by programme on the basis of a continuing dialogue with the Government of India over the next few months. Possibilities and mechanisms for supplementary funding will continue to be explored as part of the planning process. Based on the experience of recent years, and interest already expressed by some donors, supplementary funding of up to $225,000,000 will be sought for the programme.